FAMOUS RETREATS OF GREAT AMERICAN ARMIES

Dramatic Pageants That Might Become Masterpieces For Great American Artists on This Semi-Centennial—Thrilling Pictures of Vanquished Hosts Fleeing Through the Midnight Rains—Retreating Through the Mountain Passes and Through the Sweet-Scented Meadows—Historic Events That Are Now Being Celebrated.

By FRANCIS TREVELYN MILLER.

AMERICAN soldiers stand, man for man, as the greatest fighters in the world to-day. This nation has nothing to fear from the disturbances throughout Europe or the awakening of the Chinese in the Far East. The Italians and the Turks at Tripoli, nor the Japanese or the Russians in Manchuria, never saw a single day's fighting that could equal that of the Americans fifty years ago in their own Civil War. This same fighting spirit still exists to-day, and when once aroused there is no power that has been able to destroy it.

"The real test of soldiery is in the spirit of its retreats," said one of the greatest military authorities a few days ago. "Every army conducts itself courageously in victory—but the real temper of fighting blood shows itself in defeat."

The great retreats of the American Civil War were never surpassed in fighting annals, and it is interesting on this anniversary to note just how the great armies conducted themselves in the moment of despair.

First Great Retreat Fifty Years Ago.

The first retreat in the Civil War occurred fifty years ago this last summer. It is one of the most forlorn spectacles in history, and yet it transformed itself almost magically into a fighting spirit that caused the Old World to gaze upon it in amazement. It was after the battle of Bull Run when the soldiers of the Confederacy dealt their first blow against the volunteers of the Union and sent them panic-stricken back to Washington.

It had required forty hours for the raw brigades to march from the national capital to the first great baptismal font at Manassas Junction—but it required only six hours for some of the regiments to return over the same roads in the rout that followed the breaking of McDowell's lines—and it was that rout that made soldiers of them.

The greatest deed that the South ever did for American soldiery was to defeat the Federal troops on that first great battleground, and thus arouse the fighting impulse that first gained the awe, then the respect, and now the fear of the nations of the world.

All Roads Lead to the Battlefield.

Fifty years ago the Americans did not know whether they could fight or not—their valor never had been fully tested. The victories against England with earlier generations and the triumph over Mexico had given them self-assurance, but it was not until "American met American" on the field of Bull Run that American soldiery came to its first great test.

There are many reading these lines to-day who remember that eventful Sunday. It was looked upon more as a pageant than a battle. The roads to the battlefields were filled with women and children, who, in gala attire, were going out to witness the spectacle. The carriages of statesmen and politicians congested the roads leading to the scene of war. Mothers and sisters hurried in the wake of the troops. They stood on the hills and eminences around the battlefield, their hearts fluttering and their cheeks flushing as the sound of distant guns came to them. They had come as did the Romans to the Coliseum to see the gladiators fight; they had tickets of admission to the amphitheatre of war in the form of military passes. A thrill passed through the spectators as they looked upon the novel sight of battle-smoke and heard the equally novel thunder of war.

The excitement increased momentarily. Some of the more daring spectators pushed on even closer to the scream of shells where they could see the white spurts of smoke and the lurid flash of the weapons. Then came the sudden dissolution of the Federal army. The first regiment broke, and immediately became a torrent of fugitives; wherever the torrent touched another regiment, the latter melted like snow until the roads, lanes and fields were choked with panic-stricken men and women.

The stream of beaten soldiers merged with the horde of frightened spectators. The torrent flowed on, and in its midst was the holiday mob—delicate women arrayed in finery, statesmen clad in new suits of broadcloth, soldiers with bandages over their heads or arms hanging limp or a useless foot dragging on behind.

Night fell upon the routed hosts of the North. Torn, bleeding, terror-stricken—expecting to be overwhelmed by the pursuing legions of the South. Fighting their way through the impenetrable darkness, they struggled on, with the rear guard of battery and cavalry in their wake.

In the early hours of the morning, a drenching rain flooded the streets of Washington; yet, along the thoroughfares, anxious crowds waited for definite news of the battle.

The first heralds from the battle line staggered across the Long Bridge that spanned the Potomac and led into the capital of the republic. On and on they came through the morning hours—the same troops that six days before, in all their splendor, had marched away; the same troops—yet what a contrast! Now instead of the bright sunshine there was the cold, depressing rain; instead of the gay, cheerful multitude there was the sober silent throng. Now inplace of the long regular, proudly stepping column came an irregular, downcast, shuffling crowd begrimed with the sweat and dust of battle.

The colors that floated so proudly at the heads of the regiments now have scarcely a follower. But they are still held high by the color guard who refused to desert them. The flags of the republic are hanging limply in the rain—powder-stained, pierced and torn by shot and shell, telling their fearful tale of carnage. The officers who had ridden away on their prancing charges, proudly erect at the head of their columns, are returning with few or none to obey their commands.

They had learned the meaning of war. The Grand Army of the Republic had received its baptism of fire and blood; they had lain on the altar of sacrifice nearly five hundred lives. On their stretchers they bore more than a thousand wounded, and more than twelve hundred failed to answer the roll-call; while, in the camps of the Confederates were mourned nearly four hundred dead, besides fifteen hundred wounded and missing.

But of this chaotic retreat grew a spirit of nationalism that was destined to meet its foe on more than two thousand battlefields and to wage a four-years's war that has no parallel in the world's history.

If, on this semi-centennial, some great American painter could produce this historic spectacle on canvas it would become one of the world's great masterpieces.

First Confederate Retreat to Be Observed Next February.

On next February will occur the fiftieth anniversary of the first great retreat of the soldiers of the Confederacy, which, in the beauty of its setting, has equally admirable color for an American artist.

Seventy months had passed since the Union army had fled so precipitately from the battlefield of Bull Run, and in that time the soldiers of the North had been regenerated.

It was midnight. Winter had settled over Tennessee. At the headquarters of General Pillow sat the field and general officers of the Confederate army. Deep gloom was pictured on every weather-worn face. Thirty thousand grim-faced and bloodstained warriors for the Union surrounded Fort Donelson on every side, except where the Cumberland River flowed swiftly by. Theirs had been a stern task—to drive the gallant Southerners within the fort and to hold them at their mercy. Now they lay rolled up in their blankets, sleeping on their arms.

The last council of war in Fort Donelson was in progress. The face of General Floyd appeared ghastly in the dim light.

"Well, gentlemen, what is now best to be done?" he asked slowly.

The members of the council were too deeply moved to reply. Finally one of the generals suggested that they cut their way out and retreat. But it was shown that three-fourths of the soldiers would be cut down in the attempt. The argument was prolonged into the night. Standing back from the group of senior officers was a cavalier who not only would not surrender, but asked permission to attack the whole Federal army himself. When the final decision—to escape with all they could and to surrender the balance—was reached, the stern-faced cavalier, Forrest, arose. His voice was low but firm:

"Gentlemen," he said, "I cannot surrender either myself or my men. If the fort falls it must fall without us."

A few moments later he stod before his tropers. His voice was tense. "Men, the fort is to surrender. Follow me and I will try to take you out safely. I am going, if I have to go alone, and die in the attempt."

Midnight Retreat in Snow-Storm on the Cumberland.

In the early morning hours, with the snow beginning to fall, the hoofbeats of 200 horsemen could be heard along the frozen ground leading to the rear of the forts and the river roads. The night was bitter cold, a February wind whistled through the bare trees; ice gathered everywhere.

The foremost horse placed his foot upon the ice covering the slough; the second foot followed and then both horse and rider crashed through. Spurs and coaxing induced the steed to plunge in and the crossing began, and the 200 troopers splashed across while the freed water washed up to their waists.

When dawn came, Forrest's cavalry was far on its mad gallop along the roads leading to Nashville. Forrest had escaped unharmed, and Generals Floyd and Pillow followed on the hospital and transport boats in the river. The crossing occupied all the night and when daylight came a horde of refugees was seen huddled near the landing awaiting their turn.

In the meantime, General Buckner, the junior general, who had agreed to say and surrender the fort, had sent his message of capitulation to Grant, and was fearful that the dallying of the troops at the landing would place them in the hands of the Federals. He detached a messenger with this warning:

"If those boats do not leave the landing immediately, I will turn my guns upon them." Then the gallant old warrior, after the boats had fled precipitately, sat down like an old Roman and awaited the arrival of his captors, to deliver nearly 12,000 Confederates who had no opportunity to safely engage in that midnight flight from the doomed Fort Donelson.

Midsummer Retreat Among the Flowers of Virginia.

In artistic contract with this mid-winter scene is the famous "Seven Day's" retreat, the fiftieth anniversary of which is to occur next June. It is a pageant of blossoming flowers, along roads lined with roses and honeysuckles—and is considered one of the most skilful during the war.

In the ranks of the Grand Army of the Potomac 100,000 strong that marched up the Peninsula in conquest of the Confederate capital at Richmond were many of the men who had turned from the blasts of Beauregard's guns at Bull Run. Since that famous retreat they had passed through the "school of soldiery" and now stood as warriors. The first shock had been a memorable experience, and they were now preparing to enter upon the second campaign in Virginia—and to again retreat before the blows of the mighty Lee—but this time to retreat with masterful military skill.

McClellan had led his regiments to within four miles of the citadel of the Confederacy. Here they rested for a month in the swamps of the sluggish Chickahominy. Both Lee and McClellan had determined the same plan for aggressive movements; but Lee moved the quicker, as Beauregard had at Bull Run, and again as at the first battle, the Federal army was sent staggering back.

The scene appeals to the imagination: 100,000 men, baggage trains that would have stretched in a continuous line for forty miles, the rumble of artillery wagons, the hoofbeats of the cavalry—all moving over the clay roads of Virginia, while the shells from Lee's army shrieked over their heads from behind.

Stuart's incomparable troopers appear for a moment on the flank or rear of the retreating host, burning and looting whatever came to hand of any value, and then just as silently disappear into the tangle of trees and swamplands.

"Stonewall" Jackson's sleepless "foot cavalry," who had just returned from a victorious march through the Shenandoah Valley, swing into range and turn loose their devasting volleys of artillery.

Lee, clinging to the heels of McClellan's huge army on their retreat, now strikes his flanks with cavalry, and then stinging his rear with artillery, until the Federal commander is well night desperate.

Strategy in the Retreat From Swamps of Chickahominy.

As the retreat led deeper into the lowlands of Virginia, near the James River, McClellan resorted to strategy to halt the legions in the rear. Thousands of axemen took position behind trees bordering the roads over which the army was traveling, and chopped the trees nearly through. When the last supply gawon and the rear guard had passed, the final strokes were delivered. The resulting crash sounded for miles, and caused the pursuers to wonder. They quickly learned the cause when they came plunging along the road and became enmeshed in McClellan's trap.

During this retreat the historic battles of Gaines's Mill, Mechanicsville, Frayser's Farm and Harrison's Landing were fought. At Malvern Hill the retreat halted for a while, and during this rest the Confederates came upon the foe like a whirlwind. McClellan had placed his artillery on the plateau over the James, and when Lee's men swept up to the base of the hill, sixty guns suddenly opened upon them.

Within a few minutes, Lee's batteries were torn into fragments; horses lay dead upon men, and disabled cannon added to the pile. Again and again the gallant Southerners assailed the impregnable hill, only to recoil battered and bleeding. When the recall sounded, more than 6,000 men had paid the price.

During the night, McClellan again gathered his troops and marched them down the James to Harrison Landing, where, a month later, they embarked and sailed for Washington.

From Malvern Hill, Lee led his exultant army to the entrenchments about Richmond, and here they were received like conquering heroes—they had again driven the foe from Virginia and had saved the Confederate capital.

The Most Famous Retreat on American Soil.

The most famous retreat of American soldiery is that which will be celebrated a year from next July. It was after the terrific echoes of one of the world's battles—echoes from which will forever resound down the ages.

The sublimity of Lee never loomed larger than it did at Gettysburg as he stood silent by the side of his horse. The moon shone full upon his massive features. Minute after minute passed, but Lee stood motionless.

"General," exclaimed Imboden, as he looked at the great warrior, "this has been a hard day on you."

"Yes, it has been a sad, sad day to us," replied the general. For a moment longer he remained in his posture. Then, removing his arm from the back of his equally weary warhorse, he threw back his shoulders, and his face lighted with the memory of Pickett's glorious charge.

"I never saf troops behave more magnificently than Pickett's division of Virginians did to-day in that grand charge upon the enemy," he exclaimed. A smile passed over his face. Then the horrible memory of the thousands of gallant Virginians falling beneath the blasting volleys of the Federals on the hill flooded his vision.

"Too bad! too bad! Oh! too bad!" he said, turning his eyes to the ground.

Imboden's heart was wrung by the evident mental suffering of his beloved chief. He had looked deep into the heart of a great warrior. His tongue was silent. He knew no words of man could assuage the grief of this man in this moment. In a few moments the iron will of Lee had conquered again and his face resumed its usually sad and peaceful appearance. Imboden was not deceived; he knew that the same turmoil of soul was going on within, though concealed by placid features of strong character.

Caravan of the Dying on Road From Gettysburg.

The two men turned into Lee's tent as his thoughts turned from the dead to the living.

"We must now return to Virginia," he remarked. "As many of our poor wounded as possible must be taken home. The duty will be arduous, responsible, and dangerous, for I am afraid you will be harassed by the enemy's cavalry."

The following afternoon was the nation's birthday. The Chambersburg Road from Gettysburg presented a scene that has never been equaled in history. The transportation trains of the Army of Northern Virginia stretched from town to town, a distance of seventeen miles. With the rumble of the wheels mingled the moans of nearly 12,000 wounded men. Every third of a mile detachments of troops and artillery broke the line of wagons—the sole defenders of this caravan of the dying.

During the morning, the sun had hidden behind gathering rain clouds. About noon, the storm burst, and such a torrent of rain fell upon this sad procession as the natives had never before seen. The rain seemed to fall in sudden gusts and sheets, blinding, drenching.

A terrific howling wind swept aside the frail cotton coverings of wagons and tents, permitting the torrents to drench the wounded who lay streached out upon the bare board bottoms of the wagons. The horses and mules were frenzied, and seemed momentarily on the point of a stampede.

The rain continued throughout the day. Orders were smothered in the throats of the officers by the gale, and the wagons rocked from side to side. It was four in the afternoon when the remnants of Lee's magnificent legions began its march—a march that, not excepting Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, cannot be surpassed in carnage or pathos.

It was an almost endless procession; no steps were made for any cause. A wagon broke down, and it was pulled to the roadside and abandoned; a horse went lame, and it, too, was deserted, the rider going onward on foot. Night came early; but onward moved the caravan of death. From every wagon came piteous cries:

"O God! why can't I die?"

"Stop! Oh! for God's sake, stop for just one minute; take me out and leave me to die on the roadside."

Procession of 12,000 Wounded Soldiers in Wagons.

Soldiers, who had not eaten for thirty-six hours, clad in ragged uniforms of gray that were bloody and stiff with the gore and which rasped the bare wounds tossed about in agony with the movements of the wagons jostling over the rough mountain roads leading to the Shenandoah Valley; a journey that would have daunted the bravery of a well man if long continued.

"On! on!" jolted the train through the pitch black night, for in this darkness lay the only security to the retreat. The scent of the chase had already been taken up by the Federal cavalry, but they were foiled by the intensity of night.

Daybreak found the van passing through the little town of Greencastle, fifteen or more miles from the Virginia border, where comparative safety lay. But scarcely had the advance passed a mile beyond the town, when the crossroads, fields and even the mountain sides began to disgorge Union cavalry. The guards of the train were disheartened. They looked upon the swarming foe. They came by squads, by battalions, until it seemed that the whole Federal army was at last within range.

A new form of agony was now added to the near-dead soldiers in the wagons. All they could do was to lie still and listen to the hoarse shouts of men, foe and friend, the sharp rattle of carbines and the dull boom of cannon. Frequently they heard the thunder of hoofs as the Federal cavalry suddenly darted at the flank of the caravan and cut out a portion of the train; then came the beat of running feet, and the rumble of flying artillery as the wagon guards rushed to the rescue; the sudden crash of musketry, and the taunting cries of the Federals as they dashed away.

Thus continued the march through the day, until a halt was called at Williamsport, on the Potomac. Across the river was Virginia.

The Great Heart of Humanity Overwhelms Wars.

The Potomac was whirling by its banks like a mill-race. The river was swollen ten feet above its normal depth. All fords were hidden by the foaming torrent. Behind was a host of pursuing Federals, momentarily closing up. Imboden's twenty-three cannon swung around and pointed out over the foe.

The crisis of the retreat had been reached. Imboden had nearly ten thousand animals and nearly all of General Lee's means of transportation for the Army of Northern Virginia. The loss of these would be irreparable; the Confederacy was already on the verge of the financial chasm. What meagre supplies of food had remained after the fateful battle of Gettysburg had long since been consumed. Thousands of comrades were suffering agony in the throes of death for want of medical attendance. The victims of the heroic march, the bodies of which had been carried with the living in the wagons for want of time to stop to bury them, were beginning to decompose. Pestilence threatened the magnificent soldiery.

The great human heart of even war began to overwhelm the retreat. Williamsport was converted into a vast hospital. Residences were pre-empted, either voluntarily or by pressure, and the delirious patients placed in the first comfortable bed they had slept in in months, many for years. Surgeons stripped off their coats, dropping them wherever they happened to fall, and cut, sawed, bangaded, and drugged the men as swiftly as they could pass from cot to cot. Burial parties carried the dead from the wagons to hastily dug graves by the roadside. The citizens of the town poured out their material wealth by cooking and feeding the famished; and gave of their spiritual wealth by hanging over fevered brows with caresses.

Before daylight of the next day, the approach of the relentless cavalry was heralded. Confederate cannon swung their grim, war-stained mouths out over the approach. Able-bodied wagoners formed the cannon crews, with wounded line officers as captains. Throughout the day, the pursued and pursuers fought for right of way. Imboden was urged on by the moans and suffering of his charges that still rang in his ears; he fought as a lioness fights for her sick cubs.

Night came and shrouded the death grapple, before the guns of reinforcements to Imboden announced the beginning of the end of the pursuit. The last volley roared across the hills, and the Federals silently faded away into the night. The next day the infantry and artillery of the Army of Northern Virginia arrived from Gettysburg—safe at last.

During Retreat Through the Cumberland Mountains.

One of the most picturesque retreats in history is that the 12,000 troops, burdened with artillery, and defending 400 baggage wagons as they passed through the Cumberland Mountains for a distance of nearly 250 miles in sixteen days, and only lost eighty men.

It was in Eastern Kentucky, fifty years ago next September. That mountain pass, primeval in all its wildness, was the startling place and Greenput on the Ohio River was the destination. The course lay through some of the wildest mountain region in this country, not excepting the Rocky Mountains. Two large rivers, and numerous smaller streams wound across the passage.

In the depths of Cumberland Gap—this gap is eighty miles long, and its sheer sides tower 1,700 feet above the bottom—lay a division of the Federal army, under General George W. Morgan. On the 1,700-foot crests waved the standards of the Confederacy, the banners of an implacable foe that was literally starving the garrison below. By mid-September all forage for horses had gone, and the confines of the camp were littered with the bleaching bones of the victims. But a few handful of corn and beans remained for the humans. The crisis had arrived. A vision of a Southern military prison came to General Morgan—another showed him safety beyond the Ohio; but 250 miles of barren waste interposed. He called a council of war. Before him lay the map, lined with red chalk marks upon which his finger rested.

"Can I take by division by that route to the Ohio River?" he asked the topographical engineer.

"Yes, possibly, by abandoning the artillery and wagons," exclaimed that officer. But others objected.

"The enemy has stripped the country-side of food, and we have none to carry. The trails leading through the country are impassable. There is no water on the way. There are two large rivers, and several smaller ones, to cross, the enemy will be on our heels within ten hours."

Terrible Explosions in Wake of Retreating Army.

Morgan listened patiently to the argument, but silently formed his resolve:

"We will retreat immediately," he said. The council adjourned, many of the officers wearing anxious expressions.

High up on Baptist Gap, stood a Confederate officer during the afternoon of September 16. His glasses were focused upon the Federal camp at his feet. He looked long and earnestly, and finally thrust the glasses in his pocket and hurried away to his own camp.

"A long train of supply wagons is forming, and heading through the gap to the north," he reported to his superior officer. The Confederate camp was in instant motion.

But the sentinel had not seen all the movements of Morgan's men. Large charges of powder were being placed under huge storehouses, now empty; powder magazines and an arsenal were likewise mined; all movable property was placed in the wagons. The artillery carriages were undergoing a careful inspection.

After dark, the wagons were in motion, headed for Manchester, about sixty miles away. Two hours after sunset Morgan gathered his troops for their desperate dash. Throughout the night, the band of refugees toiled up and down the mountains, dragging the artillery behind. In the gap still remained a picked band of warriors who volunteered to explode the mines under the buildings. They waited until the last possible moment before daylight, to allow their comrades to get as much of a start as possible before they began their work of destruction.

At the first streaks of day, the first thunderous roar volleyed back and forth from the crags of the Cumberland Mountains. Immediately another explosion added to the thundering echoes in the gap. One after another, the mines were exploded, until the very peaks trembled under the tumult. Morgan, fourten miles away, heard the echoes, and urged his troops on. Looking back he could see the flaming sides of the gap, as though a volcano had burst suddenly and was pouring rivers of red hot lava through the defile.

From the cross roads suddenly appeared Confederate cavalry, under the redoubtable raider, General John H. Morgan, and these horsemen were to be their constant companions during the long retreat to the Ohio. At one moment the flying cavaliers dashed at the rear of the columns, and a few hours later would appear on the flanks, only to again disappear and flash into sight at the head of the troops. Thus the two Morgans sparred through the State of Kentucky.

On the 3d of October, the famished and ragged men came to the rushing waters of the Ohio, beyond which was safety to their legions. For sixteen days and nights they had marched and fought over a course of 250 miles, sleeping at night on the mountain tops without tents; fording rivers, building roads and bridges; cutting their way through forests, and all the while fighting off the daring cavalry of the Confederacy. And when they arrived every gun and wagon with which they had started was still with the column, and of the twelve thousand men in the army only eighty were lost. Not only did Morgan save his army from surrender at Cumberland Gap, but he detained a large Confederate army under Kirby Smith from joining Bragg in an attack on Louisville and thus saved the city from capture.

Last Great Retreat to Be Celebrated in 1915.

There is no spectacle in the world's history that approaches in pathos and valor the scene of the last retreat of the Army of Northern Virginia. Literally wavering upon their wasted feet, the remnants of Lee's magnificent soldiery staggered over the mud-sunk roads from Richmond to Appomattox Courthouse, a distance of over a hundred miles) in six days. The veterans of the Confederacy had often traversed more ground in less time—"Stonewall" Jackson frequently marched that distance in two days—but never under such circumstances.

This last retreat will always remain as one of the most inspiring pageants of heroism that civilization ever witnessed. Its scenes are so familiar that it is unnecessary to recall them again to-day other than to say that on the fiftieth anniversary of that event in 1915 the American people, North and South, will join hands in tribute to the American soldiery, whether it wore the blue or the gray, that proved its valor both in the victories and defeats, the marches and the retreats of this greatest war in the annals of mankind.